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Recollections of Lincoln and Seward

JAMES MATLACK SCOVEL.

ST was Seward's own famous saying, "Politics is the sum of all the sciences;" and in his entire career, eight years a Cabinet minister during the dark days of the second revolution, under two Presidents, Mr. Seward, as the second in command, proved himself a national pilot of commanding genius and a consummate political philosopher as well. Recognized as the leader of his party, and joyfully accepting the odium heaped upon the advocates of the "higher law" at a period in our national history when human bondage "clasped the Bible with hand-cuffs and festooned the cross of Christ in chains," he found himself discarded in a Presidential period for the comparatively unknown statesman from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, in the hour of his party's triumph. But he lived to admit that this man of humble origin was just what Wendell Phillips called him, "the bright consummate flower of the civilization of the nineteenth century," and—to use Secretary Seward's own words—"a man of destiny, with character made and moulded by Divine Power to save a nation from perdition."

Never were men more unlike than these two; but the love of David and Jonathan or of Damon and Pythias was not more close and tender and constant than the personal and political affection of the President and his minister. Seward represented the culture of the East, Lincoln the backwoods logic of the yet undeveloped West.

The many-sided mind of the Western lawyer, his breadth of vision, and his far-reaching wisdom, were shown in the selection of his cabinet. Cameron, Bates of Missouri, Chase of Ohio, and Seward of New York, had all been more or less prominent as Presidential candidates before the same convention which had the good sense to select Abraham Lincoln as the Republican standard-bearer.

The Presidential worm once developed in a politician's bonnet suffers change into a chrysalis that soon becomes a butterfly big with ambition. There was dissension in the cabinet when the war began. Chase, a conscious and cultivated intellect, who had been in the field as an anti-slavery leader long before Seward took an aggressive position on the questions that divided the sections, never concealed his jealousy of both Mr. Lincoln and Mr. Seward. He became a red-hot candidate for President. But when dissension was rife the wily and diplomatic Seward, in one of his remarkable and oracular speeches delivered at Auburn, New York, and flashed by the midnight wires from St. Albans, Vermont, to where "the Oregon hears no sound save its own dashing," poured oil on the troubled political waters. This sweet-tempered optimist spoke of the grim-visaged Stanton of the War Department, as the "divine Stanton," and complimented in graceful phrase the great but jealous Chase upon his marvelous financial banking system, which gave unlimited wealth to a nation struggling for its life. But while wearing a velvet glove, the gentle-mannered head of the State Department wore beneath that glove an iron hand.

That the Secretary of State who had foiled the reactionary power of Europe was justly proud of his achievements no one can deny. But he never claimed as his own the honor which the historian of the future will accord jointly to Lincoln and Seward—the honor of the delicate and difficult task which gave to liberty the rebel emissaries Mason and Slidell, captured by one of our own steamers in mid-ocean.

In an elaborate address over the grave of Mr. Seward, Charles Francis Adams gave infinitely more credit to Seward than to Lincoln, as the master-mind which "sat pensive and alone above the hundred-

handed play of its own imagination," while the great work progressed.

Mr. Adams, whose appointment abroad was due more to the influence of Seward than to the personal wish of Lincoln, did not hesitate to regard Seward as the master and Lincoln as the man. But Adams was in London, far away from the horrid front of war, and he never understood the rough, uncouth, and (to the cold and cultured mind of the Massachusetts statesman seemingly unstatesman-like habits of thought and expression in which Mr. Lincoln delighted to indulge. Mr. Adams grew up under influences, moral and social, such as those under which Seward's mind was moulded. While the Minister to the Court of St. James was watching blockade-runners, the plain, many-sided President was corresponding with the Queen of Great Britain and trampling out the little side-bar rebellion of Napoleon and Maximilian in Mexico.

To see these two men together was enough to decide who possessed the master-mind. It was the habit of the Secretary of State, during the progress of the Rebellion, to spend the morning hours, after a nine o'clock breakfast, with Mr. Lincoln at the White House. The President's favorite apartment was the large East Room. Here he was wont to receive the general public and indulge in what, in his quaint phraseology, he called his "baths of public opinion." No matter what the claimant's cause was, he generally got a hearing, though he might be laughingly bowed out of the room at the end of the seance, with a story that "pointed a moral," if it did not "adorn a tale"; but the casual visitor always went away in good humor with both the President and himself.

But Sunday morning from ten to twelve o'clock was usually accorded to the Secretary of State and the Presidential barber. Mr. Lincoln knew whom to trust, and many a solemn conclave has been held in this historical room between two men who held in their hands the fate of a nation. It was as good as a liberal education to hear two of the most important men in the world, with the simplicity of children, discuss the events of

the day, when half a million men stood fronting each other on the battle-field.

Richard Vaux, of Philadelphia, met Seward in 1845 at the residence of Josiah Randall, a leader of the old Whigs. Mr. Seward was asked to meet half a dozen then famous Philadelphians, all now dead save Vaux, who says that Mr. Seward "charmed everybody at a dinner, which lasted five hours, with his gracious diction, his good humor, and his copious and varied information on all questions of public interest."

He showed to best advantage at his own dinner-table, where his sweetness and light charmed all comers, even Lincoln, who often became a good listener when any question of statecraft occupied the mind of the Sage of Auburn. And when not talking himself, the quiet twinkle in the Secretary's eye gave ample evidence that he thoroughly enjoyed the abounding humor of the President.

This trend of Lincoln's mind was amusing to Seward, but it always angered Stanton, who did not often try to suppress his wrath. Lincoln once tried to read to Stanton and Seward a chapter from Artemus Ward's book. Stanton left the room in a pet, after declining to listen to the "chaff," as he called it, but giving the President a parting shot by asking him, "How do you like the chapter about yourself?" Lincoln only laughed and answered, "Do you know, it may be queer, but I never could see the fun in that chapter."

In conversation Seward was slow and methodical till warmed up, when he was one of the most voluminous and eloquent of talkers. No statesman in the country had a vaster range of reading, or wider experience in the management of public affairs. He had been almost continuously in public life since he was thirty, and was educated in a State where adroitness and audacity are needed to make a successful politician, who must sometimes pretend "to see the things he sees not."

The impression inevitably following an hour with Seward and Lincoln was surprise that two men seemingly so unlike in habit of thought and manner of speech could act in such absolute and perfect

accord. I doubt much if they ever seriously disagreed, while the imperious Stanton often went out with his feathers ruffled considerably.

When the cabal of Chase, Henry Winter Davis, Vice-President Hamlin, Ben Wade and a bare majority of the United States Senate, threatened to defeat Mr. Lincoln's renomination, then Seward's hand was seen in certain changes in the Cabinet. Both Chase and Montgomery Blair of Maryland, who had developed an eager ambition to be President, were told that "their time had come," and the wisdom of Seward's advice was seen in the sudden collapse of the respective Chase and Blair booms for the Presidency. The latter was snuffed out instantly, and the Secretary of the Treasury under Lincoln, though made Chief Justice, fed and fattened his Presidential bee till even his decisions during the impeachment trial of Andrew Johnson were colored by the desire he still cherished to wear the Presidential purple.

Lincoln was much disturbed by the committee on the conduct of the war. Bold Ben Wade, Senator from Ohio, always had a quarrel on hand with the President. With half a dozen Senatorial friends, in the East Room of the White House during the dark days of the Rebellion, Mr. Wade proceeded in his arrogant way to interview Mr. Lincoln.

"It is with you," he said, "all story, story. You are the father of every military blunder that has been made during the war. You are on the road to Hell, sir, with this Government, by your obstinacy, and you are not a mile off this minute."

President Lincoln, with that wonderfully good-natured twinkle in his eye, bubbling over with humor, looked straight at Senator Wade, and replied, "You think you are a mile away from Hell, Senator. That is just about the distance from here to the Capitol, is it not?"

Wade was a very hot-tempered man. He seized his hat and cane, and never entered the White House again.

After the Senatorial cabal had gone, Lincoln said to Ward Lamon, whom he loved much, "If I had done as my Washington friends, who fight battles only

with their tongues at a safe distance from the enemy would have had me do, Grant, who proved himself so great a captain, would never have been heard of again."

I had gone through the State of Pennsylvania from Indiana County to Delaware preaching the gospel according to Abraham Lincoln, while the fate of the Government trembled in the balance. The night before the day of the election which was to decide whether Andrew G. Curtin was to be elected Governor, and whether Pennsylvania was still for the war, I walked up to the White House. The door opened, and I was ushered into the President's East Room, where he grasped me by both hands.

"Boy," said he, eagerly, "what news from your pilgrimage from beyond the Alleghanies?"

Never had I seen that face light up with such a burst of gladness as when I answered, "Have no fear of Pennsylvania. The Methodist preachers are all on the stump for Lincoln and Curtin, and the young women are wearing rosettes with their names entwined. The old Keystone is good for twenty thousand majority, and that means your renomination as President." This was answered with a wild Western laugh which could have been heard over at the War Department. Lincoln for the moment was a boy again. He said, "Now we will go over and see Secretary Seward."

As was his wont, he entered the Seward mansion unannounced. The Secretary with slow, stately step, advanced to greet the President. Their greeting was warm, even affectionate, and the courtly Seward, smoking a strong Havana, soon had his guests seated before a blazing hickory fire in his own open parlor grate. Both men were keen and eager to know the prospects of the next day's election, big with their own fate. They enjoyed my running account of the scenes and incidents of the hottest administration campaign ever waged in the Keystone State. "We've won the fight," said Lincoln, joy beaming in every lineament of his face.

The wily and now well-pleased Secretary of State had a habit when things ran his way of softly rubbing his palms together. This he did, smiling blandly, as

he touched his little bell, the counterpart (a small silver bell) of the one he had in the State Department, whose light touch had, as Seward boasted, sent many a man to Fort Lafayette. His servant brought in brandy and cigars. Lincoln smiled, but touched nothing. He neither smoked nor drank.

Soon after this I went abroad as bearer of despatches to Minister William L. Dayton at Paris and to Charles Francis Adams, in London, carrying also letters of introduction from Mr. Lincoln to Richard Cobden and John Bright. I spent ten days at Rochdale at John Bright's home, and three days at the country house of Richard Cobden at Hazelmere, one hour's ride from London. Both men heartily sympathized with the Union cause and sent words of good cheer to President Lincoln. Cobden spoke in warm words of praise of the great patience, courage and wisdom of Lincoln, and compared him with William the Silent of Holland. Of Secretary Seward he did not entertain the same lofty opinion, regarding his prophecy "that the war would last but ninety days," as belittling the great revolution. Cobden told me that he owned much valuable property in America in the State of Illinois, and at one time expected to move there and take an interest in the management of the Illinois Central Railway. But Cobden died before the war ended, and did not live to see his fellow-soldier in the fight for the liberation of humanity, John Bright, take his place in the Cabinet.

I went to Europe in November, 1863, and returned in February, 1864. Again I met the President and his Secretary in the East Room of the White House, and gave an account of my experiences in Paris and London. Both were in deep perplexity at the efforts of the Senatorial cabal to defeat the President's renomination.

During the conversation which ensued the President rallied Mr. Seward on the particularly bitter attack made by a segment of the New York press against the Secretary, presumably inspired by the Senatorial cabal, who believed that if they could bounce Seward they could control Lincoln or defeat his re-election.

"Ah," Seward replied to this badinage, his face passionless, "I am sure if it pleases the newspapers it does not hurt me. These assaults on you and on me remind me of what the Prince de Conde said to the Cardinal de Retz in Paris when the latter expressed his surprise at a pile of abusive pamphlets lying on the French statesman's table. 'Don't these bitter and unjust assaults on your fair fame disturb your slumbers, Conde?' 'Not in the least, Cardinal,' said the Prince. 'The wretches who write those diatribes know that if they were in our places they would be doing themselves just the base things they falsely endeavor to fasten on us.'"

Lincoln paused a moment, smiling, and said, in his lawyer-like fashion, "Yes, Mr. Secretary, the Prince's point was well taken."

The seance ended, and the good President followed me to the head of the stairs, grasping both my hands with a parting "God bless you, my boy!" which lingers in my memory like a benison even to this day.

Twice afterwards I saw Secretary Seward—once at his own house when Andrew Johnson was President. I recall to-day how his birds of bright plumage were chattering in the dining room, whither the charming optimist led us, while the same Scipio Africanus of another administration brought out the brandy and water in the old Lincoln decanter. Andrew Johnson's Secretary of State had his crest "full high advanced." He introduced me to Provost Paradol, who represented the "Man of December," Napoleon III,—the same minister who the next summer shot himself to death at his Washington residence. After the French minister had taken his departure, he said, "This is the happiest day of my life, for I have this morning received official intelligence from the French ambassador that France and Austria have finally abandoned the Tripartite Alliance, which boasted that it would place Maximilian on the Mexican throne and menace the United States with a foreign protectorate over Mexico."

It cost Mr. Seward as Secretary of State just \$15,000 to send his ultimatum

to the "Man of December," Napoleon III, by telegraph, that the French must withdraw from Mexico *eo instanti*. Napoleon vacated within a week, leaving Maximilian to be shot and the Austrian Queen, his wife, in a mad-house.

Later I saw Mr. Seward for the last time. He had perceptibly aged with the cares and anxieties of office, but he was the same bright, happy, chirpy optimist and delightful talker. It was in his beautiful home in Auburn. Andrew Johnson had ceased to be President, but had returned to Congress as one of the Senators from Tennessee. Horace Greeley, his ancient enemy, who later adopted Seward's policy of peace and reconciliation in 1872, still lived, and still hated the man from whom he had snatched the nomination at Chicago. Mr. Seward had just returned from his journey around the world. His Presidential aspirations, with all other worldly ambitions, were laid aside. Kings and Princes had done him honor abroad. When I sent him my card I received a summons to dine with him that day. He was in a reminiscent mood, and some things he told me cannot here and now be repeated. In defense of his own policy under Johnson he recalled to me the story of Conde and the Cardinal de Retz. He read me a letter from Alexander H. Stephens, of Georgia, in which this memorable phrase occurred: "When lenity and cruelty play for power, the gentler gamester is soonest winner."

We sat with post-prandial cigars beneath a shade-tree, near the present mausoleum of the great patriot, and the gentle philosopher said, "I have never had occasion to regret the policy of reconciliation I sought to make acceptable to the country. I was pledged to it before Lincoln. I said in my last public utterance, 'Some pilots may be washed off the decks of the ship of State during the violence of the storm, but the ship will sail on to a safe harbor at last.'

"No one man is needed to carry on this Government of ours. Others will be raised up to do our work when we have laid it down. Here under my own vine and fig-tree I live, waiting the end, serene and happy in the consciousness

that I can wait the coming on of time for my vindication. I hope I can say, with Cicero in his old age, 'Sweet are the recollections of a well-spent life.'"

Abraham Lincoln made no secret to his intimate friends or having written more than one personal letter at the time of the Slidell and Mason affair to Queen Victoria, to all of which prompt replies that were sent by that noble and good woman, whom the President called "The most womanly of queens and the most queenly of women."

He read the first of these answers in the East Room of the White House before Mr. Seward and the writer of this. The President said, "I think the friendship of Queen Victoria will carry America safely across the dangerous quicksands of diplomacy threatening to involve the United States in war with England in regard to the capture of Slidell and Mason." History has bitterly censured Seward for his political fidelity to Andrew Johnson. I cannot. It was Mr. Seward, with Thurlow Weed, who nominated Andrew Johnson for Vice-President against Lyman Tramaine of New York, who was Horace Greeley's candidate. The Secretary of State felt responsible for Andrew Johnson, and his wisdom, possibly, saved the country from civil war during the storm and stress period of reconstruction.

Mr. Lincoln's Philadelphia speech on his first journey to Washington was a key to the unselfish and pathetic self-abnegation of his pure and lofty life. And he died in the battle for the liberation of humanity, as a common soldier dies, slain by a dastard, when the hottest of the fight had ended, in that immortal conflict for the imperishable and imprescriptible rights of man.

Bancroft speaks of Lincoln's "wanness of heart"—a comprehensive expression for the underlying sadness and tenderness of his nature. The President's manners came from the abounding sincerity and from the soul of gentleness and considerate goodness within the man.

"Consideration like an angel came
And whipped the offending Adam out of
him."

When the brigadiers would come to the White House, as they often did, with complaints of each other, Lincoln would say, "General, you remind me of two good sound Methodist men, both friends of mine in Sangamon County, Illinois—Farmer Jones and Fiddler Simpkins,—both big men in their way. Jones was proud of his acres and of his gifts in prayer, while Simpkins, a rollicking good fellow, semi-occasionally a Methodist, could always call the country side to rejoice anywhere at the sound of his violin, of which he was master. Simpkins could play but he couldn't pray. One night at the Wednesday evening meeting Father Jones made a wonderful prayer which touched the spirit of the assembly. Simpkins thought it became him to say something. He said, "Brethren and sistering, I ain't gifted like Brother Jones—I can't pray like him—but by the grace of God I can fiddle a shirt off him."

Andrew G. Curtin was known to fame as a war Governor of Pennsylvania. A. K. McClure, the brilliant editor of the *Times of Philadelphia*, but a double-endner and a mugwump in politics, for a quarter of a century was always credited with being a power behind the throne while Curtin was Governor. If Mr. McClure had been out of the game, when the North was looking for candidates for the Presidency among the war Governors, Curtin might have been President of the United States. Mr. McClure was so close to Curtin that he has been known to say, "that it was better to own a Governor than to be a Governor." Governor Curtin complained a great deal, and Edwin M. Stanton, who was often irritable, would carry Curtin's ugly sounding despatches to Lincoln and make his remonstrances.

Governor Curtin was earnest, able and untiring in keeping up the war spirit of his State, but was, I admit, at times over-bearing and exacting in his intercourse with the general Government; on one occasion he complained and protested more bitterly than usual, and warned those in authority that the execution of their orders, in his State, would be beset with difficulties and dangers. The tone of his despatches gave rise to

an apprehension that he might not co-operate fully in the enterprise on hand. The Secretary of War, in great wrath, laid the despatches before the President for advice and instruction. They did not disturb Mr. Lincoln; he knew Governor Curtin, and his complaints only amused him. After carefully reading all the papers, he said, in a cheerful and reassuring tone:

"Never mind, Mr. Stanton, these despatches don't mean anything. Just go right ahead. Governor Curtin is like a boy I once saw at the launching of a ship. When everything was ready, they picked out the boy and sent him under the ship to knock away a trigger and let her go. At the critical moment everything depended on the boy. He was ordered to do the job by one direct and vigorous blow, and then lie flat and keep still, while the ship slid over him. The boy did everything right; but he yelled as if he was being murdered, from the time he got under the keel until he got out. I thought the skin was all scraped off his back, but he wasn't hurt at all. The master of the yard told me this boy was always chosen for that job, that he did his work well, that he never had been hurt, but that he always squealed in this way. That's just the way with Governor Curtin. Make up your mind he is not hurt, and that he is doing the work right, and pay no attention to his squealing. He only wants to make you understand how hard his task is, and that he is on hand performing it."

After General Cameron came home from Russia, Mr. Lincoln sent Curtin as Minister to the Czar's dominions.

After the battle of Antietam, which was fought September 17th, 1862, Ward Lamon tells how he sang for Mr. Lincoln on the battlefield a pathetic song, beginning:

"I've wandered to the village, Tom, I've
sat beneath the tree—
Upon the school-house playground that
sheltered you and me.
But none were left to greet me, Tom,
and few were left to know
Who played with us upon the green some
twenty years ago."

In speaking of suffrage to the black man the President said, "General James Wadsworth of New York, one of the grandest men of the war, was shot and killed while on horseback leading his brigade in the bloodiest day of the battle in the Wilderness. In General Wadsworth's pockets was found my own letter to him, stained with a soldier's blood. This letter said: 'We have clothed the black soldier in the uniform of the United States, we have made him a soldier. He has fought for his right to be a citizen; he has won it with his blood; it cannot be taken away from him.'

Had Lincoln lived and Thurlow Weed died before Mr. Seward, Andrew Johnson's Secretary of State would never have said what Hilary Herbert quotes in the Atlantic Monthly for April, 1901.

Mr. Seward said in April, 1866: "The North has nothing to do with the negro; they are not of our race; they will find their place; they must take their level; the laws of political economy will determine their position, and the relations of the two races; Congress cannot contravene this."

Continues Mr. Herbert, sadly: "But Mr. Seward and his views were then in a woeful minority;" but God and Abraham Lincoln say this country has too much to do with the negro in every way. But that question is too vast for this paper; it will be settled in the coming on of time, for, as Napoleon said at St. Helena:

"There is no power without justice."

To see and know Abraham Lincoln unreservedly, in his daily official life, as I

did, was to feel,

"All Paradise could by the simple opening of a door
Let itself in upon him."

The last time I saw him was but a few days before the 14th of April, 1865.

I went to Washington to present the President with a pair of cuff buttons I had caused to be made for him in Philadelphia. He was as joyous as a child (Lee had surrendered on the 9th of April) and neither of us then thought that the triumphant road of justice must forever be watered with human tears. He put the sleeve-buttons on in a playful mood, and wore them that awful night in April. I recall that interview as the happiest hour of my life. He had come back from Richmond with his little boy. Jefferson Davis had gone South in a hurry, and peace had come, and come to stay. His soul was full of joy, as he rose, six feet four in height, and bidding me good-bye in the White House, taking me by both hands, a habit he had when aroused, and with luminous face bade me again be seated. He said, "Young man, if I am permitted to rule this nation for four years more this Government will become what it ought to be, what its Divine Author intended it to be, no longer a vast plantation for breeding human beings, for purposes of lust and bondage, but it will become a new Valley of Jehosaphat, where all the glad nations of the earth will assemble together worshiping a common God and celebrating the resurrection of human freedom."



